



## Septic System Fact Sheet – What to Do After a Flood

### Where can I find information and assistance on my septic system?

Contact the Division of Water Resource's Ground Water Discharges Section for advice and assistance. For Sussex County Residents contact: (302) 856-4561. For Kent and New Castle County Residents contact: (302) 739-9947.

### Should I pump my septic tank?

No. Only after floodwaters have receded should a septic tank be pumped. Under severe conditions tanks can float out of the ground when pumped causing damage to the inlet and outlet pipes. Metal tanks and cesspools can collapse from the water pressure against the sides of the tanks during pumping. The best solution is to drastically reduce your water use and plug all drains in the basement until floodwaters recede.

### What if I dispose wastewater from my business into a septic system (either a home-based or small business)?

If your business is disposing wastewater containing chemicals into a septic system, extra precautions to prevent skin, eye and inhalation contact are necessary especially if the wastewater backs up in the basement or inside the home or business. The proper clean-up will depend on what chemicals you are discharging. For information and assistance contact DNREC's Solid & Hazardous Waste Management Branch at (302) 739-9403.

### What do I do with my septic system after the floodwaters have receded?

- Do not use the septic system until the floodwaters have receded below the water level around the house.
- Do not open the septic tank for pumping while the soil is still saturated. Mud and silt may enter the tank and end up in the drainfield.
- Contact a Class F - Liquid Waste Hauler to have your septic tank professionally inspected and pumped as soon as possible after the flood. Pump both the septic tank and the dosing chamber if applicable. While most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding, any silt or debris that has entered the tank needs to be removed to avoid clogging the drainfield area. Contact the Ground Water Discharges Section for a list of Class F Licensed Liquid Waste Haulers. Homeowners should never clean or repair a septic tank due to dangerous gases that can build up in septic tanks.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement or inside the dwelling, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly. Avoid dumping any water back into the sink or toilet. Wait until you are certain a backup will not happen again.
- Flooding of the septic tank may have lifted the layer of fats and greases found inside septic tanks. Some of this scum may have floated and/or partially plugged the outlet tee. If the septic system backs up into the house, check the outlet baffle on the septic tank.
- Do not drive or operate equipment over the drainfield area. Wet soil is especially susceptible to compaction which can lead to system failure.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that the inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- Sod or reseed areas over the septic tank and drainfield area if erosion damage has occurred.

### Suggestions for reducing your wastewater flow:

- Stay with a friend, family or at a hotel until floodwaters recede.
- Flush toilets only when necessary.
- Do not use the washing machine or dishwasher.
- Avoid washing dishes, use disposable utensils and paper plates.
- Shower at another location.
- Repair leaking pipes and faucets.
- Purchase bottled water for drinking and cooking.

**Floodwaters can become contaminated from both your wastewater and your neighbors. Use caution and avoid contact as much as possible.**